



GUIDE

Screening Overview

SCREENING OVERVIEW

This Best Practice is focused on “screening”: the process of gaining information to determine whether to engage or hire someone who will have access to children and teens. Generally, screening employees and volunteers is about determining an applicant’s overall fitness for a position. Screening through the lens of child safeguarding is about determining if an applicant can be relied upon to keep children and teens safe from maltreatment.

Why screen?

While screening is not foolproof, it can yield valuable information that enables you to gauge whether potential employees and volunteers understand boundaries, are likely to uphold your child safety protocols, and remain alert to potential threats against children and teens. By engaging in thorough screening, your organization has the opportunity to:

- Learn more about candidates, identifying areas of strength and areas in which they will require support to uphold your organization’s safeguarding practices.
- Communicate its values and policies for safeguarding children;
- Identify individuals who have records of offending;
- Potentially deter individuals seeking to harm children from gaining access to your organization.

Hiring within the Jewish Community

No matter how entrenched individuals may be within the Jewish community, they must undergo a complete screening before working with or having regular access to children and teens. Occasionally, Jewish organizations relax their screening process, such as when faced with:

- an imminent hiring deadline or pressing need
- an applicant who is recommended by a trusted source
- an applicant who worked for a well-respected Jewish institution, or
- an applicant who shares a social network with a hiring committee member.

Best Practice 3

Screen Employees and Volunteers

Goal 1

Learn about Screening

OBJECTIVES

- Understand the importance of screening volunteers and employees through a child safeguarding lens
- Learn about the most commonly utilized child safeguarding screening tools

AUDIENCE

Committee members and individual(s) responsible for hiring

TIME

1 hour to read



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Safeguarding Our Children

Stay alert to these tendencies and resist the urge to relax screening safeguards. Remind yourself that no matter how pressing the need to hire, the need to safeguard children from maltreatment is even more pressing. Never rely on a previous organization's screening, as the organization may not have screened thoroughly or new information may have emerged.

A Note on Legal Compliance

Federal, state, and local governments have enacted numerous regulations to protect applicants from discrimination in hiring, some of which may conflict with screening safeguards. For instance, the Centers for Disease Control recommend including a disclosure statement that asks applicants about previous criminal histories of sexual offenses. While this recommendation can help safeguard children from maltreatment, in some jurisdictions, like New York City, employers are prohibited from inquiring about convictions until they have extended a conditional offer of employment. As you work through this Best Practice, remember that before finalizing your screening plan, you will need to consult with an attorney to ensure that it is legally compliant.

SCREENING MEASURES

Below is a brief description of screening measures introduced in this Best Practice. These measures are strongest when used together, as no one tool provides a complete picture of an applicant. At the same time, implementing a thorough screening process takes time and resources. Allow yourself in Goal 1: Learn about Screening to learn about each screening measure without feeling the need to implement them immediately. Screening is not all or nothing, and in Goal 2: Create a Screening Plan, we will guide you through evaluating your current screening protocols and developing a staggered plan to improve them.

Educating on Child Protection

Properly implemented and well-distributed, a child protection policy is like a secure perimeter. Breaches in this perimeter can serve as early indicators, alerting bystanders to potentially dangerous behavior before it escalates. A poorly communicated policy on the other hand is severely limited in this regard, as it becomes impossible to determine if a breach in policy reflects ignorance or nefarious intent. The best way to avoid this problem is to share your policy widely and often. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control recommend sharing information about your organization's commitment to child protection as a beginning step in the screening process, long before employees and volunteers ever walk through your door. Such information can include a formal child-protection policy, a code of conduct or ethics, guiding principles or a child protection values statement. They also recommend asking applicants to sign a written affirmation that they have read, and agree to abide by, these child protection documents.

Why is educating on child protection important?

Informing applicants of your child protection policies and procedures at the beginning of the screening process sends an important message about the value you place on safeguarding children, and how



serious you are about enforcing your policies. This alone may deter some individuals seeking to harm a child or teen from applying for the position. Those that do apply, and are later accepted, know from the onset what is expected of them when interacting with youth and cannot later claim ignorance as a defense. Finally, discussing child protection directly with applicants can help you determine which individuals will be most likely to champion child protection and model safe behavior. This Best Practice provides sample questions and video simulations for incorporating such conversations directly into interviews.

Written Materials

Written materials include a written application, cover letter, and resume. Reviewing these materials is a beginning step in your screening process, providing insight into applicants' values and priorities. Significant gaps or concerning information in the written materials highlight potential red flags and provide material for interview questions and reference checks.

Written application

A written application asks applicants for technical information, such as contact information, educational history, employment/volunteer history, and references. It may also ask for qualitative information such as an individual's approach to discipline or experience safeguarding children. Written applications usually include a consent form notifying applicants that you will be collecting additional information during the screening process. As discussed above, the written application is also a good place to attach your child protection policy and accompanying affirmation.

Cover Letter and Resume

If a resume indicates a short duration at each place of employment or gaps in time between places of employment, inquire about such details in both reference checks and interviews. A resume that includes a place of employment that concerns you or conflicts with your organization's values should also prompt follow-up questions. A cover letter that includes such information or seems not to reflect your organization's values deserves similar follow-up.

Why are written materials important?

Requiring some amount of written materials helps your organization to:

- Formalize the application process
- Communicate that your organization takes child protection seriously and expects full compliance with organizational protocols
- Use information provided by the applicant as a reference point to confirm or follow-up on through additional screening measures
- Receive consent from the applicant to conduct further screening
- Creates a record that may be referenced throughout the screening process and, if necessary, once employment has begun



Interviews

Interviews assess an applicant's suitability for a given position. They also play an essential role in determining an applicant's ability to keep children safe, including the applicant's willingness to observe the organization's safeguarding policies. Interviews should always be conducted before allowing the candidate to engage with the community in any professional or volunteer capacity, and they should include direct questions about child safety.

Why are interviews important?

Interviews help your organization to:

- Learn about an applicant's experience and interest in working with children and teens
- Relay organizational expectations pertaining to safeguarding children and teens
- Ask direct questions that evaluate the candidate's ability to protect children and teens.

Observations

In addition to the interview, organizations should consider observing applicants as they work with youth (e.g., a model lesson). Applicants may produce the "right" answers to interview questions, but observing their interactions with children can better illustrate how they embody these values.

Reference Checks

References should have supervised applicants' work specifically with children or teens and should speak to their qualifications for the position. Organizations should conduct reference checks for all prospective employees and volunteers who will interact with children and youth.

Why are reference checks important?

Reference checks help your organization to:

- Gain a more complete picture of the applicant
- Verify information provided on the written application
- Confirm the applicant's interview answers about keeping children and teens safe
- Determine if previous employers or references have concerns about an applicant's ability to keep children and teens safe

Background Checks

Background checks are usually required when an individual's position involves regular or unsupervised access to children (e.g. most states require them for positions at child care centers and public schools). Background checks can include: criminal and civil records; driving records; verification of employment, education, and professional licenses; credit information; internet searches and scans of public social



media sites; drug testing, and other assessments. In Goal 2: **Create a Screening Plan**, we'll help you consider what positions in your organization merit background checks and what information each requires. Your organization can compile this information yourselves, hire a professional to do so, or use a hybrid model. Professionals can generally offer a more comprehensive search as well as assistance navigating legal requirements, but they are costlier.

Why are background checks important?

Background checks can help verify an applicant's identity, education, and employment history as well as locate pertinent criminal or civil records. While they may help an organization uncover such records and consider potential risk, they have limitations. It is important to remember that most individuals who have maltreated a child are never caught, and, even if they are, most are not convicted. In such cases, there is often no documentation of a history of abusive behavior. Therefore, background checks should be considered a baseline screen to always be used in conjunction with other screening measures.

CONCLUSION

A thorough screen to protect children from maltreatment includes numerous screening measures. If one screen returns an incomplete, inconclusive, or concerning finding, you'll need to add, or give greater weight to, other screening measures.

